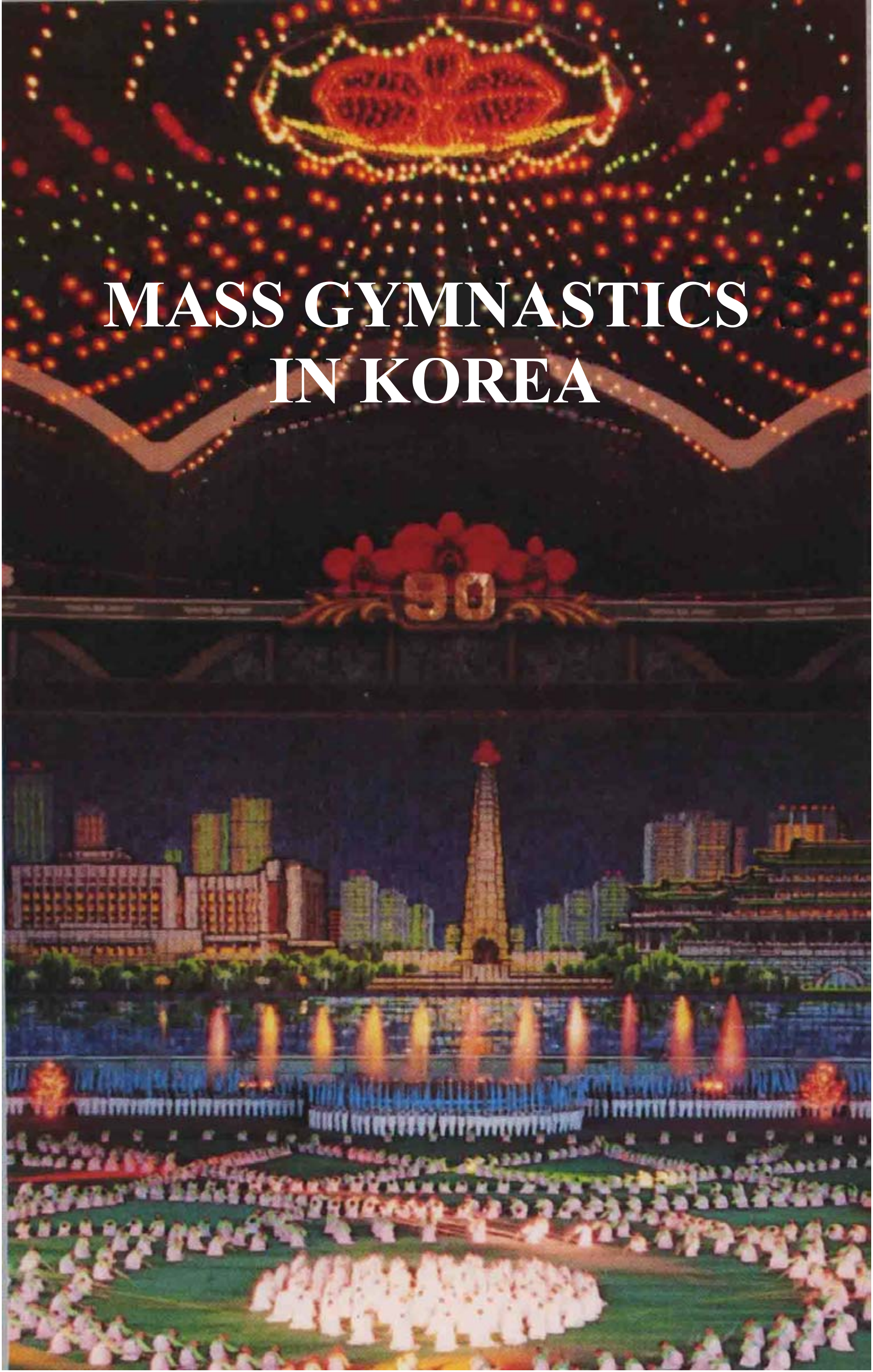
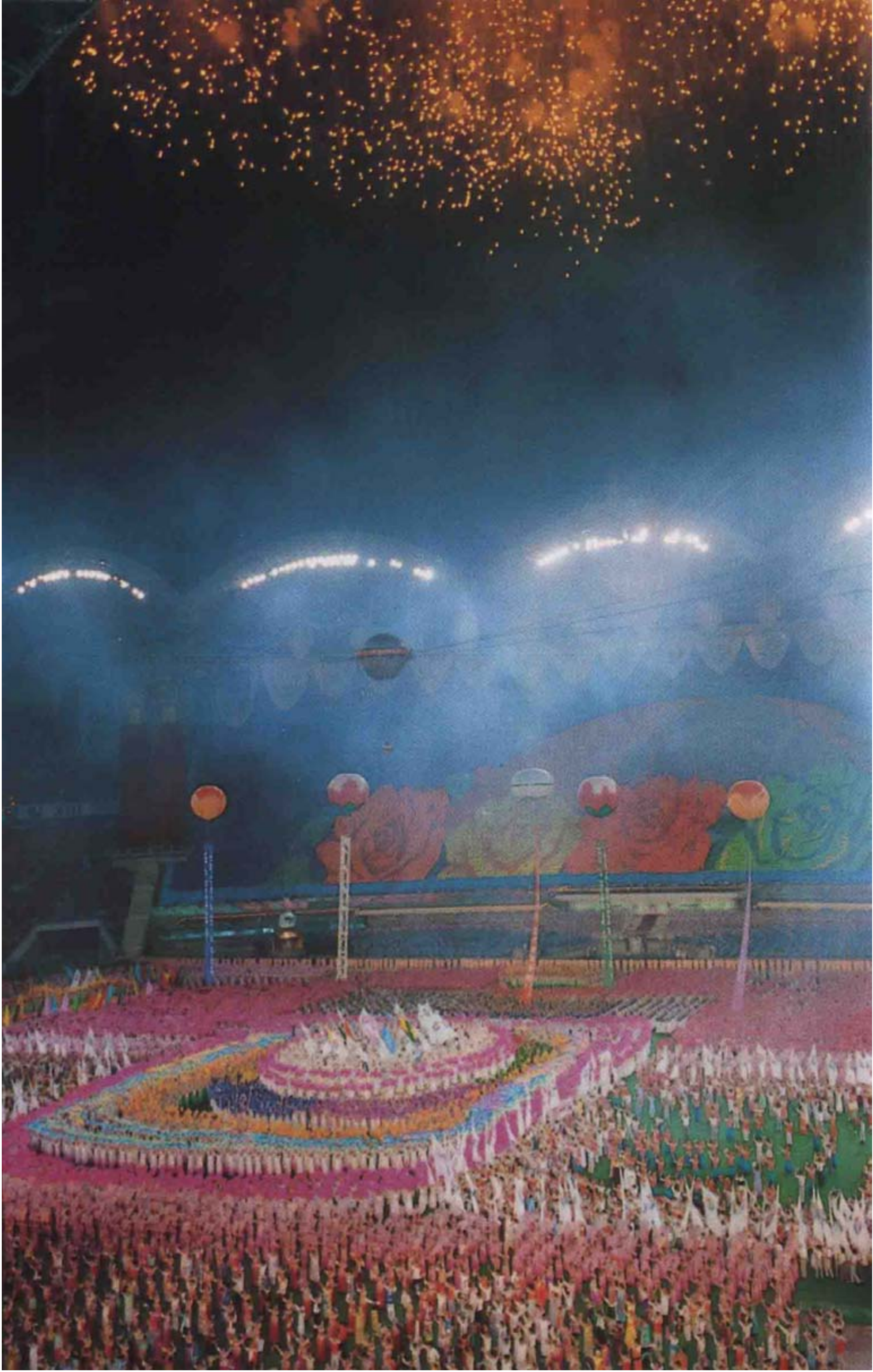
MASS GYMNASTICS IN KOREA



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강성대국







Kim Jong Ho, Vice-Chairman of the Mass Gymnastics Production Company and People's Athlete



Gymnastic formation (top) and backdrop (below)



PREFACE

Kim Jong Ho, Vice-Chairman of the Mass Gymnastics Production Company and People's Athlete of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, says of Korean-style mass gymnastics:

"The Juche-oriented mass gymnastics of Korea originated from *Flower Gymnastics,* a work President Kim Il Sung created in 1930, the early days of his anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle. Today, it represents the ideological theme of the history of the country and nation splendidly through the combination of gymnastic formations, backdrops involving tens of thousands of people, and music.

"Unlike a sports competition, where athletes compete for a prize, the mass gymnastics of Korea brings pleasure and satisfaction to the performers as well as to the audience, and instills in their hearts hope for the future. I think it is because every piece reflects the proud, victorious course the country has traversed in the face of tremendous difficulties and hardships, and the people's unshakable will to bring about a still better future.

"The Korean style of mass gymnastics has led the development of mass gymnastics, which originated with the aim of training people's physiques, into a form of gymnastic art. Its ideological theme now promotes social development and it trains not only the people's physiques but also their spiritual power.

"On September 19, 1961, *The Era of the Workers' Party,* the first truly Korean-style mass gymnastics piece, was performed at the Moranbong Stadium, the present-day Kim Il Sung Stadium, in Pyongyang. Since then, decades have passed, during which scores of pieces of mass gymnastics have been produced. In October 2000, the grand mass gymnastics and artistic performance *The Ever-Victorious Workers' Party of Korea,* an epic story of the Renaissance of the 20th century in Korea, was staged.

"The mass game that thrived in some European countries in the past was confined to the gymnasts performing simple gymnastic movements or making a number of formations, including towers, to the accompaniment of music. Therefore, priority was given to



A scene of *The Era of the Workers' Party*, the first work of the mass gymnastics of the Korean style (The photo was carried in the October 1961 issue of the pictorial *Korea*.)

developing eye-catching, individually-performed gymnastic movements rather than to the overall synchronization and harmony of the gymnastic formations.

"From the mid-20th century Korea's mass gymnastics performances introduced backdrops and began to follow a characteristic and fresh road of development which distinguished them from the European mass game in terms of the components used and the style. After *The Era of the Workers' Party,* and with the subsequent production of several mass gymnastics pieces styled on it the borrowed expression 'mass game' disappeared.

"As Kim Jong Il pointed out in a meeting with the mass gymnastics producers on April 11, 1987, the Korean style of mass gymnastics is a mixed form of comprehensive physical exercises with a combination of high ideological content, artistic quality and gymnastic skills.

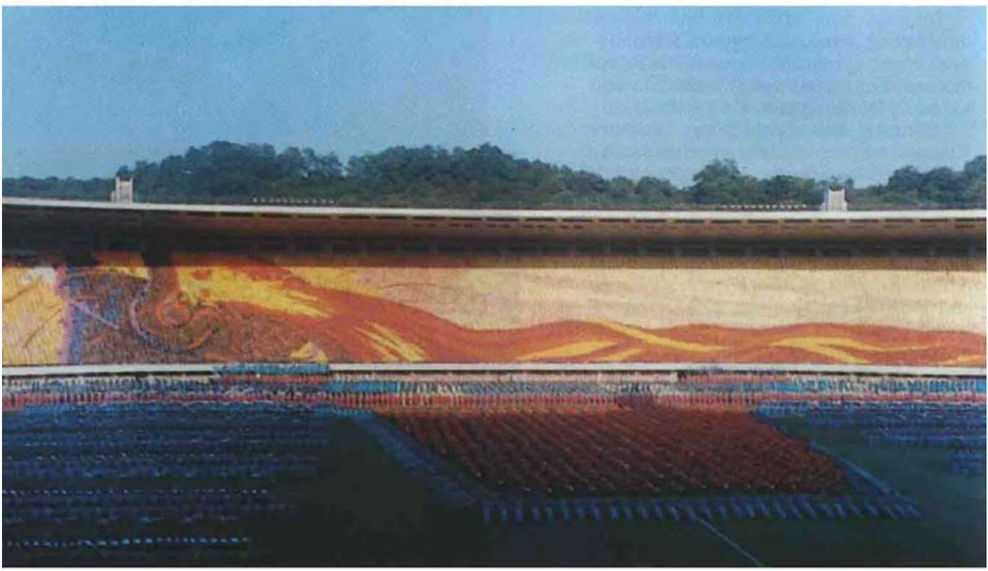
"As can be seen in the grand mass gymnastics and artistic performance *Arirang* being performed now, the Korean style of mass gymnastics will continue to develop, opening a new field in the process."



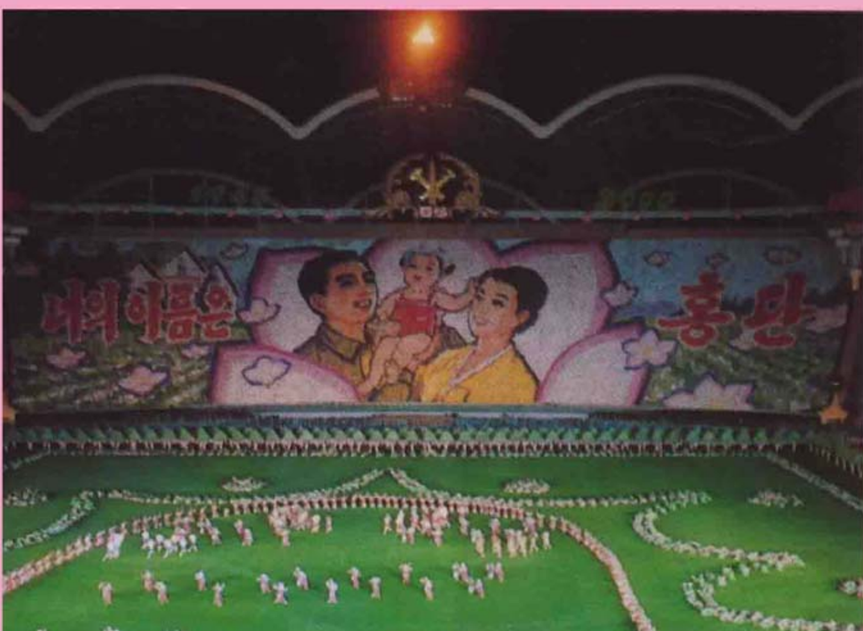
Music, an essential component of the mass gymnastics

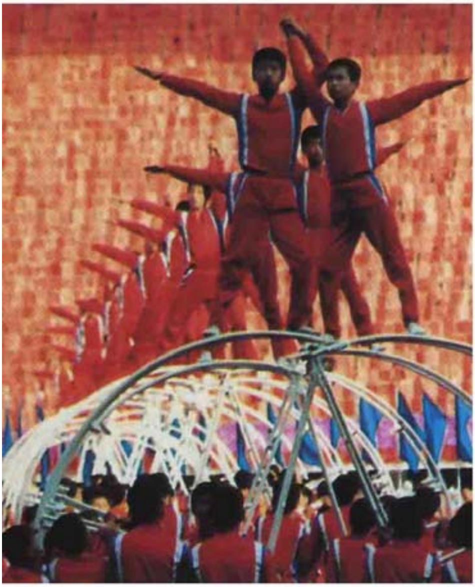


**Scenes of the indoor mass gymnastics (above)
and outdoor mass gymnastics (below)**

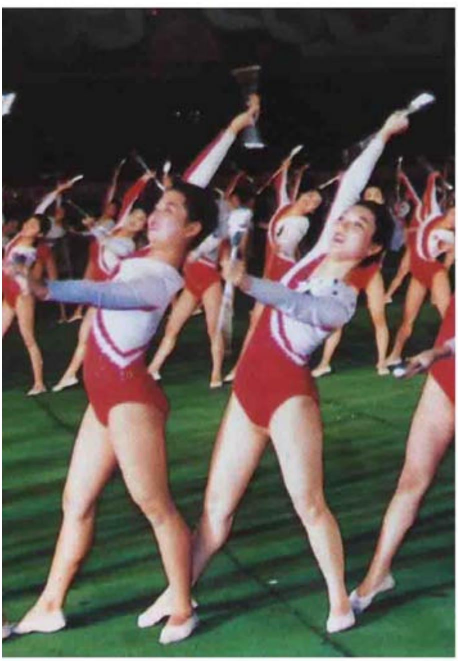


THREE MAJOR COMPONENTS OF KOREAN MASS GYMNASTICS





Vigorous and forceful movements make mass gymnastics worth enjoying.



FIRST COMPONENT: GYMNASTS

Gymnasts Are the Most Important Means of Presentation

Every one of the three components is essential for mass gymnastics to be a work of gymnastic art. But they are not identical in their degree of importance.

In Korean mass gymnastics, gymnasts are the most important means of presentation, true to the meaning of the term "mass gymnastics". Gymnasts are so named to distinguish them from the backdrops and music.

For the gymnasts to play their role fully, they must perform a variety of gymnastic movements; only pieces with vigorous and forceful movements will sustain the gymnastic character of the performance and entertain the audience. The gymnastic movements used in mass gymnastics performances number dozens, ranging from free exercises and other simple movements performed using flags, bars and other equipment to calisthenics performed using hoops, balls, ropes and clubs and, requiring a high level of skill on the part of the performer.

No less important than gymnastic movements are gymnastic formations and representational formations.

Gymnastic formations are the arrangement of gymnasts on the ground at set distances for their movements, whereas representational formations involve the formation of letters, pictures, signs or emblems by the gymnasts for the symbolic representation of the theme of the work. Representational formations are, in essence, complex symbolizations using gymnastic formations.

A work, according to its theme, flows through the combination of various formations, such as column, line, diagonal, arc and complex formations. The representational formations, like a flower basket, a torch or characters, for

example, "Peace" and "Friendship", frequently seen during mass gymnastics performances, are all made through the change of gymnastic formations.

As a story line that conveys the theme of a work to the audience, the gymnastic and representational formations are created on the principle that they reflect the intention of the creative workers and they are never similar to one another.

Careful planning and a high level of skill provide for the execution of the change of formations in a short space of time and ensure the continuous flow of the performance. Careful attention is also paid to the gymnasts' entrance into the performance area and their exit, an important part of mass gymnastics, so that they are executed through unique and gymnastic change of formations and in reference to the previous scene.



The great numbers of representational formations of gymnasts help the audience understand the outline of the work easily.

The Trapezoidal Graph

The trapezoidal graph is a graph of the performance area dotted with the positions of the gymnasts, drawn as seen from the central seating area of the spectators. The graph is drawn in detail by using a trapezoidal sheet of paper proportional to the size of the performance area. If another performance area is to be used, another graph must be drawn.

The production of a trapezoidal graph is a prerequisite for accurately arranging the gymnasts at spaces and distances defined after taking into account the size of the performance area, the number of gymnasts and the distance from the central point of the audience.







Merited Artist Ho Jong Ae produced *Waves of Difficulties*, an act in *The Ever-Victorious Workers' Party of Korea* staged in October 2000.



Merited Athlete Kim Myong Sun; she creates gymnastic movements done with hand apparatuses.



Gymnasts Must Not Dance

Mass gymnastics must have its own gymnastic movements. If many dance movements are introduced, it will become a mass dance, not mass gymnastics.

Not only the first mass gymnastics work of the Korean style, *The Era of the Workers' Party,* but also all the other works of this kind produced in the last century, fully sustained their gymnastic characteristics and portrayed their themes.

Nevertheless, there were difficulties in the past in their creation.

Some creative workers argued that an artistic quality should be given to the overall representation of the work, claiming that the style should be changed in step with the development of mass gymnastics and the style of presentation should correspond to contemporary aesthetic taste. The tendency to make mass gymnastics resemble performance art was reflected in various aspects of production: the gymnasts were made to whirl round and round in dance movements drawing a circle, large or small; narrative or poetry incongruous with the flow of mass gymnastics was inserted; musical pieces were played gently, as in theatre, allegedly to sustain the mood; floats were introduced in disregard of the gymnastic performers.

Mass gymnastics has many qualities but most important of all is that it makes the audience feel invigorated by means of forceful and vigorous gymnastic movements. If mass gymnastics is put on an artistic basis, it will be deprived of its forcefulness and thus lose this excellent attribute.

Introducing many vigorous gymnastic movements, instead of artistic, dance-like movements, and subordinating the backdrop and music to the role of adding relief to the performance of the gymnasts are principles adhered to in Korea in creating mass gymnastics works. Special effort is directed to creating and introducing many gymnastic movements that require a high level of skill and are designed to contribute to the schoolchildren's physical development.

Merited Athlete O Chun Ok; she produces finale of the mass gymnastics works, an act participated by 20,000 to 30,000 performers.



A mass gymnastics work depicts its theme while sustaining its gymnastic character.



Gymnastic movements done with torches in the work *O Korea, I Will Add Glory to Thee* staged in February 1997

I Am Fortunate

The following are impressions of the south Korean delegates to the sixth north-south high-level talks in Pyongyang after enjoying a mass gymnastics performance:

"The performance was enthralling. I am so impressed that I cannot find the words to express my feelings. I am fortunate to have seen it." (Jong Won Sik, senior delegate)

"The schoolchildren all look happy. They would not smile so beautifully if their life was not happy in reality.

"The children are called kings in the north, and I can now understand even a bit its meaning. I am very thankful to you for showing us a wonderful performance." (Kong Ro Myong, president of the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security)

"The performance was just wonderful. The schoolchildren look beautiful as one.

"Frankly speaking, south Korea cannot produce this kind of work. It can neither educate children in that way nor produce such a work. The delegates of the north said today that we must know the reality in the north and that we cannot say we know the reality unless we have witnessed a mass gymnastics performance. Now we have come to know the reality they wanted to show us." (Ri Tong Bok, spokesman)

"It was marvellous. No one can enjoy such a mass gymnastics work in any other part of the world. The north has reached the summit of acrobatics and mass gymnastics." (Song Phil Je, freelance commentator)

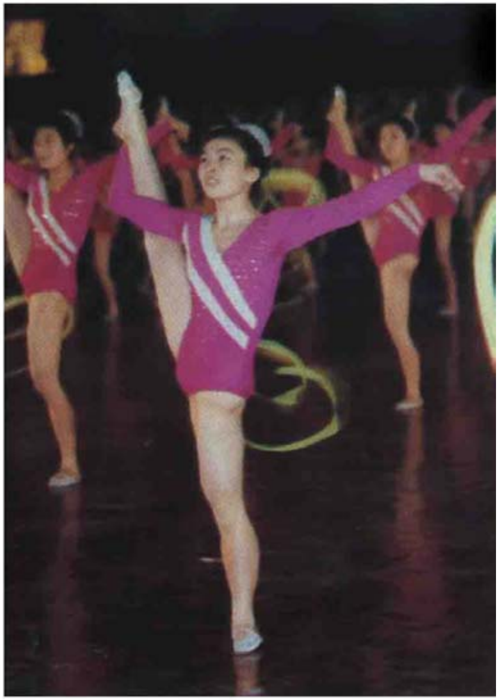
Equipment and Costumes of Gymnasts

Ensuring that the gymnasts play the central role in the portrayal of a work is easier said than done. Even if the gymnastic forms are changed through free exercises, calisthenics and apparatus exercises, and the gymnastic and representational formations are changed in a diversified way, it is not easy to avoid the repetition of movements and scenes in the process of delineating the rich content of a work.

The key to improving the form of mass gymnastics is the introduction of new gymnastic apparatus that meets the demands of the times and caters to modern aesthetic tastes.

The equipment is divided into light items (hand apparatus) like clubs, flags, hoops, balls and ropes, which gymnasts can hold in their hands while executing gymnastic movements, and heavier ones like horizontal bars, parallel bars, mattresses, springboards, poles, trampolines, and ladders. These pieces of equipment play a useful role in representing the content of a work.

In the production of one piece, undulating golden ears of rice were portrayed by means



Introduction of heavy apparatuses has improved the level of portrayal of gymnastics.





Hoop is an apparatus widely used in mass gymnastics.



Children are practising on unicycle. They are especially fond of the apparatus.

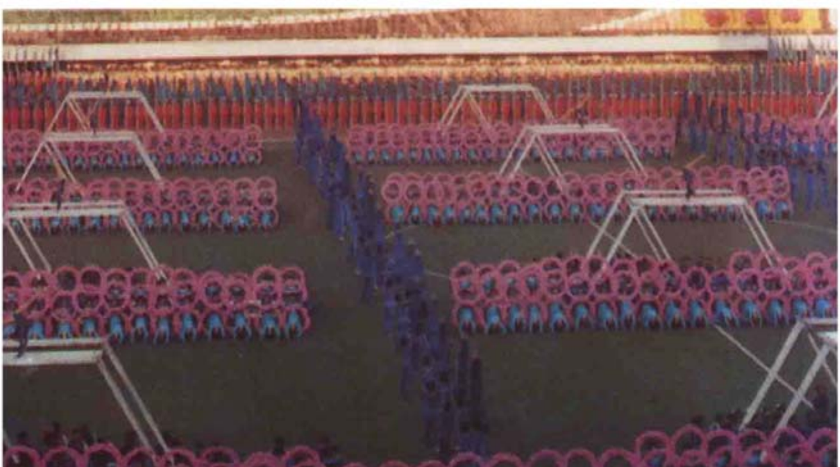
of clubs covered by gold foil. The result was so lifelike that the audience were quite astonished by it.

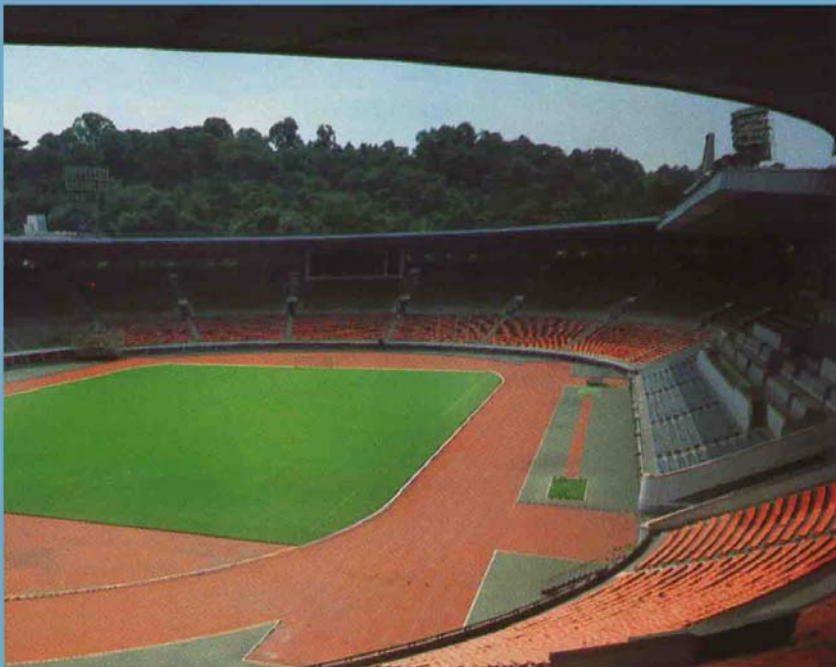
The apparatus is made in such a way that it represents the content of the relevant work clearly yet also serves the gymnastic purpose, so that the gymnasts can perform by means of the apparatus the movements that require high skills. The size and weight of the apparatus depend on the physical development of the gymnasts who will use them, and the need for colour, stability and safety are taken into full account in its production.

The gymnasts' costumes are an important means of raising the level of gymnastic representation.

In making costumes, the tendency to neglect their gymnastic characteristics on the grounds of their importance to the theme of a work must not be tolerated. They must be convenient, simple and elastic so as to facilitate free movement and represent the content of the work. They must also cater to the people's national emotions and feelings. Perceptions of colour differ from one country to another, so costumes of a colour that does not suit the audience's tastes will not arouse their interest.

Ladder used widely in the gymnastic formations





Kim Il Sung Stadium

Kim Il Sung Stadium is situated at the foot of scenic Moran Hill in Pyongyang. Hence its original name, Moranbong Stadium. The first Korean-style mass gymnastics work, The Era of the Workers' Party, was performed in this stadium.

The stadium has 100,000 seats. It is laid out especially for the holding of mass gymnastics: the backdrop section and spectators' seats are at a pitch that allows spectators to see the backdrops without any trouble; the performance area was originally covered with straw mats at the time of the performance of mass gymnastics, but in 1977 it was covered with 10,000 square metres of artificial turf.

In his lifetime, President Kim Il Sung enjoyed several mass gymnastics performances in this stadium.

Ranks of Flag-Bearers Acting as a Curtain

The ranks of flag-bearers in mass gymnastics play the role of the curtain in a theatre. They make way for the entrance and exit of gymnasts between scenes during the performance, and provide rapid cover for other activities. They must take care that the performance area is not left vacant between scenes.

With regard to this, command over the places for the gymnasts' preparation for entrance, command over their entrance and command over their exit points must be coordinated.



A Work of True Gymnastic Appearance

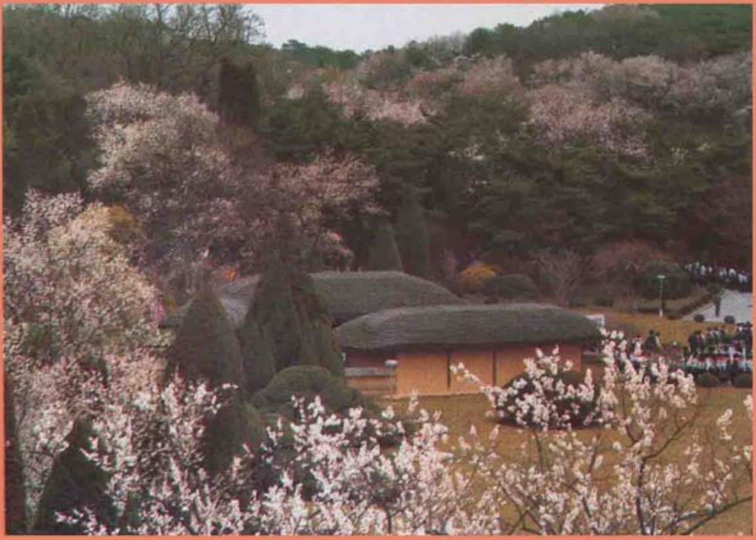
On September 9, 1988, the mass gymnastics work 40 Years of the DPKK was performed in celebration of the 40th anniversary of the DPRK. That day, Kim Il Sung Stadium, the venue of the performance, seethed with the 50,000 schoolchildren participating in the performance and the spectators filling the stadium to its capacity.

Composed of a prelude, eight acts and a finale, the work gave an epic portrayal of the founding of the DPRK, the genuine defender of freedom and rights of the Korean people, and its development into a powerful country of independence, self-sufficiency and self-reliant defence. It also sang the praises of the Korean people's faith in and optimism for the future.

This work was distinguishable from the previous works of mass gymnastics, in that it realistically depicted the 40-year history of the DPRK in its content and its form was gymnastic from beginning to end. It was a great success, raising the level of gymnastic skills for a fresh and characteristic representation.

The backdrops used presented larger and more symbolic pictures and letters, and the three-dimensional effect was increased with the use of luminous coloured paper, and tin and gold foil.

The energetic playing of the brass band provided the music for the performance.



Mangyongdae, President Kim Il Sung's birthplace

Kanemaru Shin Sheds Tears

Kanemaru Shin, former Deputy Prime Minister of Japan and a member of the House of Representatives visited Pyongyang in September 1990, heading a delegation of the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party. A leading figure in the party for his sharp political insight, he came to Pyongyang with a desire to normalize relations between Japan and the DPRK. As part of his itinerary he visited various places in the city, including Mangyongdae, the birthplace of President Kim Il Sung, and the Mangyongdae Schoolchildren's Palace.

On September 25, he enjoyed a performance of the mass gymnastics work, *Single-Hearted Unity*. The work portrayed the reality of Korea united as one.

Schoolchildren numbering 50,000 executed skilful gymnastic movements, moving in absolute unity.

The Japanese politician was so moved by the performance that he began to shed tears, oblivious to those beside him.

Tears speak for sincere, warm and unaffected words.

Kanemaru had been prejudiced and hostile toward Korea, regarding it as a distant neighbour, but after enjoying the performance, he became a new man. Lavishing unstinting praise on the work, he said to his Korean guide.

"It was wonderful. I have enjoyed what I could not in any other country of the world.

"It is hard to guess how strong Korea is and how fast it will develop. If the younger generation grow as stoutly and healthily as we see here, Korea's future is promising."

On the way back to his accommodation and later that evening, he continuously spoke of his impressions of the performance.

He said to his deputy, a former minister of transportation;

"This is a great country. It has nothing to be afraid of. We must get on well with such a country."



A backdrop portraying Jong Song Ok, who won the gold medal in the women's marathon event in the 7th World Track and Field Championships

SECOND COMPONENT: BACKDROP



Merited Artist Choe Myong Ho (right) and other producers of backdrop for the mass gymnastics

New Ground Is Broken

The expectations of man develop incessantly and, accordingly, he improves his creations and makes new ones.

European mass games had been no exception. But no one had given a perfect answer to the question of how to make it more relevant to the people.

Korean creative workers in the field of mass gymnastics threw themselves into the task of finding an answer. The result was the development of a new component of mass gymnastics: the backdrop.

Backdrops added beautiful and rich colouring to the mass gymnastics work, conveying its content visually.

Whereas the backdrop in drama or opera helps to explain the dramatic situation or circumstances, the backdrop in mass gymnastics directly represents the theme of the work and brings the gymnasts into relief.

The introduction of backdrops was a great stride forward in the development of mass gymnastics.





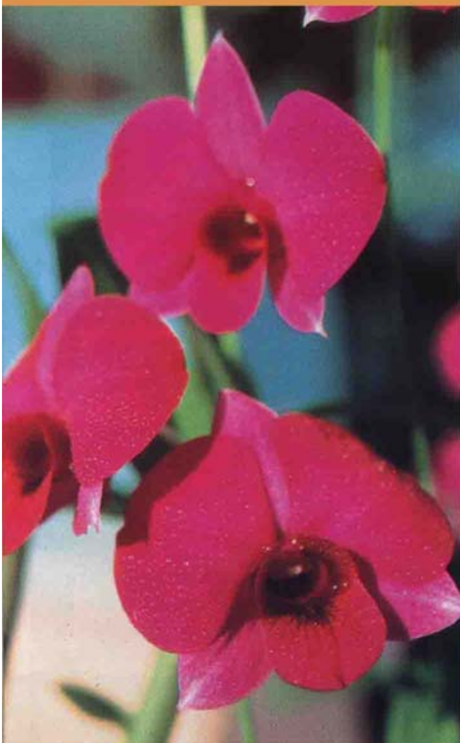
Monumental buildings in Pyongyang (above) and swinging and see-saw, Korean traditional games (below), depicted in the backdrop

Producers have introduced large slide projectors for the backdrops of the indoor mass gymnastics.





Kimilsungia on the backdrop



Kimilsungia--in April 1965 Sukarno, the then President of Indonesia, named the flower after President Kim Il Sung.

Presentation of the Backdrop

By means of pictures, letters and three-dimensional and rhythmic presentation, the backdrop explains or delineates what gymnasts and music cannot portray, thus making a mass gymnastics work an epic. The backdrop producers regarded as one of their objectives the rendering of visual changes and contrast to the backdrop so as to make it draw the spectators' interest. This was quite important in mass gymnastics, which was not simply a combination of gymnastics, as it had to represent the contemporary history of Korea.

The backdrops of Korea's mass gymnastics have now reached a high standard; their size and grandeur outshines a work of fine art and the constant changes highlight the gymnasts. But things were different in the 1950s.

A book of backdrop panels of the mass gymnastics work performed in 1955 in celebration of the day of the country's liberation numbered 10 pages. These books displayed some letters. This was the first appearance of the backdrop. In those days it was designed in a narrow and crude way, and its pictorial screen was not larger than a large poster.

The backdrop had to be harmonized with the gymnasts on the large performance area, who numbered in the thousands each time, unlike the backdrop in a relatively small theatre, and show constantly changing pictures. The letters and pictures had to be made large so that they could be seen clearly from every place in the arena. In order to solve this problem, the creative workers tried to increase the size of backdrop. The letters filling the backdrop drew the attention of the spectators and expressed the content more explicitly.

Once the schoolchildren for the backdrop were seated farther apart than before and their books were two times bigger than the previous ones. The creative workers calculated that, by doing so, they could make the backdrop look clearer, as

the number of joints between the books would decrease by half. But it was a subjective view. It became difficult to turn the pages of the books, the screen became rough, and if the wrong page was displayed it was much more conspicuous. It could be likened to the fact that large tiles pasted on a wall, incongruous and irregular, do not present better colouring than small tiles do. This problem was overcome by the development of a book of the most appropriate size.

The creative workers gave the backdrops a three-dimensional and symbolic effect, thus better expressing the content of the work. This was a fundamental improvement in the quality of description provided by the backdrop.

But these were not all that had to be solved.

If the first picture displayed on the backdrop remains fixed throughout the performance, no one will enjoy the mass gymnastics work. The number of pictures had to be increased. The greater the number of pictures, the greater the reduction in the time between each change. It would open the possibility of a rapid sequence of changes, showing realistically the flow of history and the current of contemporary times.

The book of panels for the backdrop, which had numbered just a few pages in the 1950s, reached 70 pages in the 1960s, 130 pages in the 1970s and 170 pages in 2000.

In order to sustain the beauty and rhythmic presentation of the backdrop by means of its speedy changes and techniques in harmony with the vigorous gymnastic formations, the creative workers introduced various methods of turning the leaves of the books and closing them. Several other problems were also solved to present a beautiful and fascinating backdrop.



Kimjongilia on the backdrop



Kimjongilia--in February 1988 Kamo Mototeru, a Japanese botanist, named the flower of his breeding after Kim Jong Il.





Drawings *Prosper Ye Motherland* (above) and *Smelter's Joy* (below) are represented on the backdrops.





Backdrop Art

The art for the backdrop is different from other genres of fine art. Unlike a piece of graphic art, which is stationary, the backdrop is constantly changing mosaic. In other words, the 10,000 schoolchildren who display the backdrop present pictures or letters by linking the panel books. These books are made by enlarging the design of the backdrop and plastering small sections of the design on them. As the number of seats for the backdrop constitutes the size of the picture, the size is incomparably larger than normal works of art.

The time during which spectators can enjoy a scene of the backdrop is very short, and many elements within the scene rapidly change to form a dynamic image.

Pictures for the backdrop have their own unique characteristics. Size and colour are decided before the artist begins his work. In other words, they are drawn in some defined colours, not by mixing. This requires a high level of skill on the part of the artists in order to produce an excellent contrast by means of the available colours.

Hand Props for the Backdrop

Korean artists have introduced various hand props to enhance the artistic rendering of the backdrop.

One of them is bellows. Cloth or paper is folded at regular intervals like a pleated skirt. If it is expanded, it produces a three-dimensional effect like a natural flower, an effect incomparable with that produced through the contrast of colouring in a plane picture. Bellows is used when there is a need to bring a certain object into relief. For example, if bellows surround a letter, the letter becomes conspicuous.

Other hand props used include small umbrellas, pieces of cloth and plastic sheeting, tin foil and gold foil.

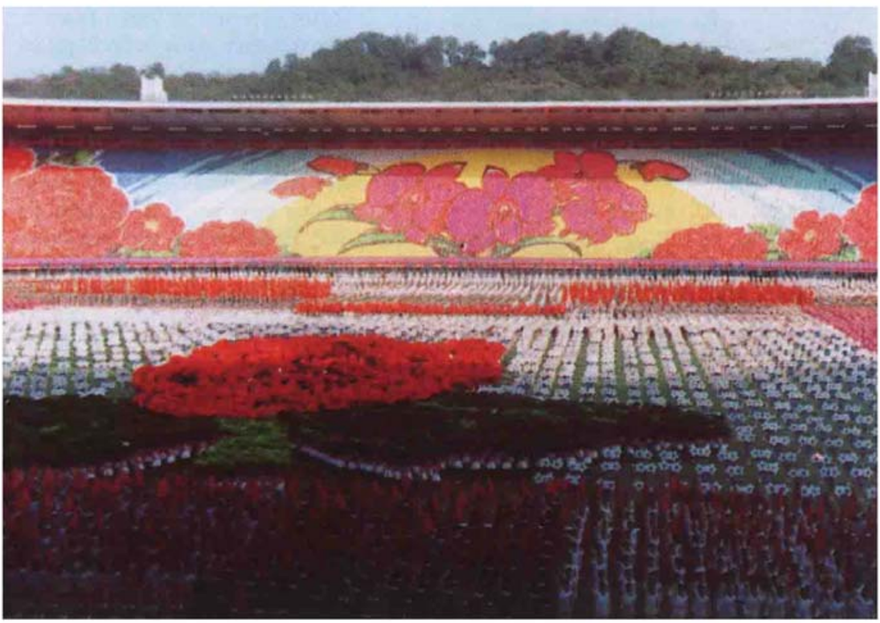
If a small umbrella is opened and folded continuously, it can portray a twinkling star. A line can be used to depict a seagull flying up and down against the blue waves of the sea. Pieces of stick plastered with tin foil can portray a fountain.

In this way, the variety of hand props is almost limitless. These hand props are used to enhance the impact of the backdrop.



A pigeon is depicted by means of bellows.

The representational effect of the backdrop is as high as that of fine art.





The change of letters and pictures on the backdrop is performed in an instant.



The backdrop divided into districts (above) and schoolchildren enthusiastic about the honour of their respective districts (below)



The Largest Picture in the World

If a scene of the backdrop is considered a picture, it could be called the largest picture in the world. It is true that panels and hand props make up the backdrop, but presenting a harmonized picture by synchronizing all the panels and hand props cannot be executed other than by a human being.

In Korea, this task is performed by schoolchildren aged 13 to 15.

After class they gather to practice under the guidance of creative workers and teachers. They participate in the practice with unusually high zeal, for they are aware of the importance of their role and feel very proud of it. This is the result of instruction from organizations of the Children's Union and the Youth League.

After a period of basic practice, all the children of a school gather together to form ranks. They then try to produce an ensemble by practicing sitting in line, holding the panel books in horizontal and vertical harmony, opening and closing the books and using hand props to enhance the artistic rendering of the backdrop. The backdrop can be called perfect only when they synchronize their movements under the command of one man.

The task demands a high sense of organization, concentration and responsibility, and the schoolchildren of Korea perform it wonderfully.

Commands and Signals for the Backdrop

The various signals used to command the actions of the children are very important for the backdrop to present excellent scenes.

The commander's flags and the board displaying the panel numbers should be made large so that all the children can see them clearly.

According to the given signals and commands, like "Confirm the number!" "Ready!" "One!" 'Two!" and "Three!" the children move rapidly. The slightest blunder will end up in making mess of the synchronization in the rapid change of backdrops.



Merited Artist Kim Tong Il commanding the backdrop

The Secret of the Backdrop

In July 1989 a short course was held in Pyongyang for specialists in mass gymnastics from the nonaligned countries.

At the end of a course on enlarging the designs for the backdrop, a specialist from India asked the lecturer:

"I can understand the effect created by the gymnasts after seeing them with my own eyes. But I can't understand how the panel books are opened at exactly the same time and how the non-existent flowers come into being. I think these are executed by mechanical means. You say that the performers are human beings; I want to know the secret."

"It's not a big secret," the Korean lecturer answered.

The lecturer showed him how a panel book is opened in technical combination with the expanding of bellows. The Indian specialist thanked him for teaching him the secret.

He was confident that he could present a wonderful scene on the backdrop. But what he didn't know was that the secret method of rendering could be performed only when the people who are trained for the task are available.

The harmony of the backdrop is produced by highly organized, disciplined and responsible people who can open in an instant the panels marked with more than 100 numbers and prefixes and at the same time skillfully handle the hand props.



Music provides rhythmic motion for the gymnastic ranks.



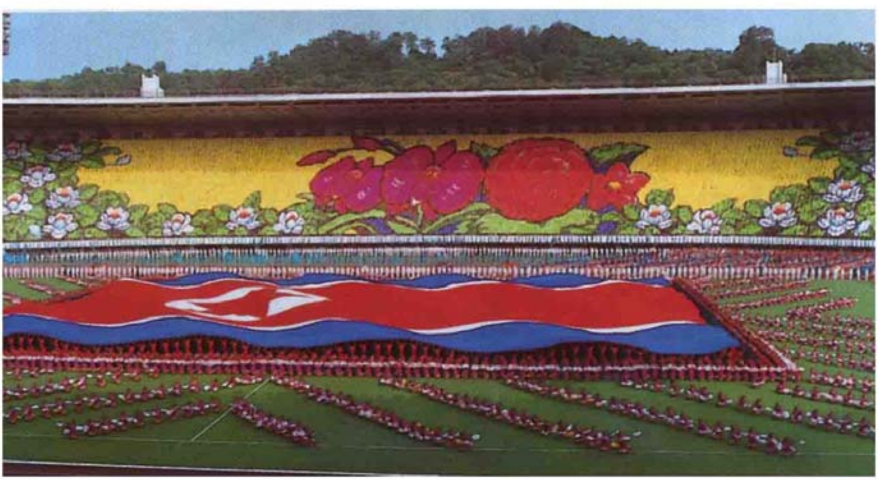
Music occasions changes in the playing ranks.

THIRD COMPONENT: MUSIC

Music is one of the three major components of mass gymnastics, together with the gymnasts and the backdrop.

The synchronization of the gymnastic movements and the changes of gymnastic formation performed by many performers is accomplished not by commands, but by music. Music supplements the ideological content and emotion of the performance, which are difficult to express through gymnasts and the backdrop alone, creating a much more powerful effect. Gymnasts might try to portray the content of the work by means of various gymnastic movements and changes of formation, but so long as they are related with gymnastics, they cannot produce a clear ideological and emotional portrayal. Music, with its own rich artistic language and ability to express emotions, overcomes this limitation. Music also ensures harmony between the gymnasts and the backdrop. It provides rhythmic motion for the performers and the backdrop and occasions changes in the scenes, incorporating them into a harmonious, artistic sequence. In this sense, music can be said to be the conductor of a mass gymnastics performance.

Music is programmed in keeping with the characteristics of a mass gymnastics production.



Music incorporates the gymnasts and backdrop in a harmonious sequence.

To this end, the creators must have a clear knowledge of not only the theme of the work as a whole, but the content of each act and scene and its gymnastic rendering, and select musical pieces accordingly.

Since mass gymnastics is based on momentary visual effects and convincing power, not on deep thought and review, music must represent the times and be programmed with pieces that are both familiar and popular. Attention must be paid to making the musical pieces contrast with each other in mood and characters. If they do not, the overall musical flow will be stereotyped, lack novelty and feel monotonous. This means that the gymnastic movements should be designed in accordance with the fundamental requirements of the gymnastics production and the sequence of the work and the music should then be synchronized with those movements, not vice versa.

Music for mass gymnastics work should be played vigorously by brass and wind instruments to sustain the character of the mass gymnastics.

The musicians of Korea, who had worked on mass gymnastics performances without any knowledge of the specific requirements in the early days of their production, have now mastered its unique nature.



Discussing a musical piece (Merited Artist Kang Kun Hong, far right, and People's Artist Jo Jae Son, second from right)



The band works energetically to preserve the way and mood of playing instruments befitting mass gymnastics production.

The Rule of Giving Orders to Gymnasts and the Rule of Dynamics

In general, the command, “One, two, three!” is given to induce a concentrated display of strength. The first two moments that fall on "one" and "two" mark the preparation for a decisive moment, and the third moment that falls on "three" calls for the explosion of strength.

In music, however, the first beat is strong and the following beats are weak. Therefore, a weak beat falls on the third moment when a dynamic explosion of strength is needed on the part of the gymnasts. In order to solve this problem, the composers of the music for works of mass gymnastics take great care in creating melodies and arranging musical pieces so that the third beat is strong. They ignore the general rule of dynamics and give force to every beat when gymnasts march or perform vigorous movements.



The Only Mass Gymnastics Band in the World

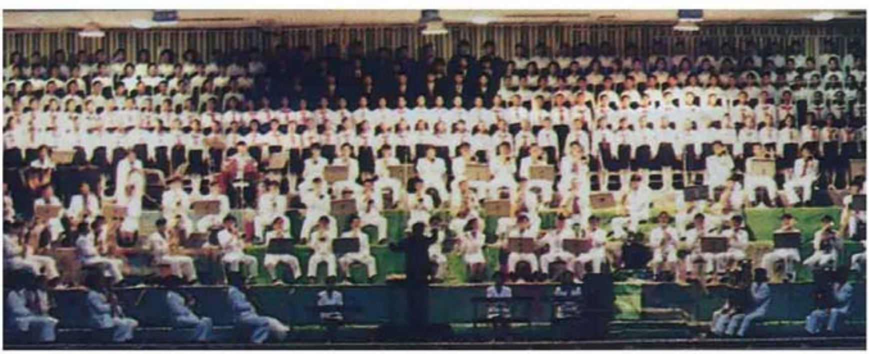
In its early days, the Korean Mass Gymnastics Production Company did not have a band of its own. In those days the band that performed at national celebrations was used to provide the musical accompaniment to mass gymnastics works. This resulted in the impediment to performance of the band mobilized and the difficulty for the creators of the works. The band would be rushed into performance without grasping the content of the work in detail, giving them no chance to create appropriate melodies and arrangements. The result was that the producers of the mass gymnastics were unable to make the gymnastic movements and scenes keep step satisfactorily with the music, no matter how excellent they were. Consequently, there was a failure to sustain the general idea and gymnastic character of the work. These shortcomings were overcome with the formation of a dedicated band for mass gymnastics.

The Mass Gymnastics Band of Korea was formed in August 1986. There are many musical companies under various names around the world, but a band for mass gymnastics is found only in Korea. With the formation of the band, the creative team is now able to solve the problem of musical representation from the script development stage, thus raising the standard of the gymnastic rendering of a work to a higher level.

Merited Artist Han Ki Chan, conductor of the mass Gymnastics Band (above), and the band in practice (below)



The band providing musical accompaniment to a mass gymnastics work





Scenes from the mass gymnastics *Under the Banner of Songun* staged in February 2002

INDOOR MASS GYMNASTICS

In 1992 the Korean mass gymnastics producers buckled down to the production of mass gymnastics piece indoors to celebrate Kim Jong Il's birthday on February 16.

No country had ever presented an indoor mass gymnastics piece up to that time, and there were manifold difficulties to overcome in this new undertaking.

The most challenging was the matter of backdrop. The producers arranged the backdrop at the back of the stage of the Pyongyang Indoor Stadium, the venue of the performance, as they used to do outdoors. But the distance between the seating area and the backdrop was so short that the changes of the backdrop were clearly visible to the audience and seemed discordant with the physical movements on the floor. After great consideration and discussion about the problem, the producers agreed that the backdrops used for the outdoor performance could be replaced by projected backdrops, but this also posed a problem. As many as six large slide projectors at a time were







A backdrop and gymnastic movements in an indoor mass gymnastics work





required to project the images onto the wide background screen, and they had none.

Another issue was the scale and length of the performance.

If tens of thousands of people were enlisted in the performance, as was the case with outdoor performances, the density of performers would grow due to the restricted performance area, causing impediment to gymnastic movements and making a profound representation of the theme impossible. Such a situation would probably provoke boredom among the audience. The producers decided to create a 50 minute-long piece involving 10,000 people in all.

The next problem to be overcome was the use of large-size, heavyweight equipment.

Equipment such as the tower frame for the finale was too large to be used indoors, and heavyweight equipment like the hexagonal frame and circular frame might damage the floor, which was covered with wooden boards. As far as the gymnasts' performance was concerned, the producers directed their efforts mainly to the presentation of vigorous physical movements with empty hands and a variety of calisthenics using hoops, clubs, skipping-ropes and balls. They attached importance to the frequent use of lightweight equipment and other sectional equipment which can be assembled such as iron bars in the performance.

Meanwhile, they introduced acrobatic movements in a fresh way to improve the representation of the performance.

With all the above-mentioned problems resolved, the producers could at last present the premiere of the indoor mass gymnastics piece, *Forever with the Party,* at the Pyongyang Indoor Stadium on February 16, 1992. *Following the Party over Thousands of Miles,* an indoor mass gymnastics performance staged in February 1993, made use of Korean-made large slide projectors throughout its representation and introduced electrical fireworks and a variety of lighting methods, using, for example, laser beams, to enhance the descriptive effect of illumination.

An Impeccable Performance

On February 19, 1996, the Pyongyang Indoor Stadium staged the indoor mass gymnastics performance, *We Will Defend the Red Flag Under the Leadership of General Kim Jong Il,* given by 10,000 young people and children. Composed of seven acts, including a celebration act and prelude, it demonstrated the will of the Korean people to maintain their advance, guided by General Kim Jong Il, and surpassed previous performances in its representation with its strong element of physical culture highlighted by the characteristic gymnastic skills. It presented a profound gymnastic rendering of vigorous physical movements with hand-held flags, skilful and immaculate acrobatic movements and excellent gymnastic formations and representational formations. The backdrops, made up of 102 slides in all, unfolded new and distinctive scenes through their three-dimensional and flowing representation. More than 20 famous pieces of music, performed using brass and woodwind instruments, helped to raise the ideological and artistic quality of the performance. This piece was described as an "impeccable performance" of mass gymnastics.

The Wish of a King of the Professional Wrestling World

Inoki Kanji, head of the Sports Peace Party of Japan, member of Japan's House of Councillors, and president of the New Japan Professional Wrestling Company, is a disciple of Rikidozan, (originally Kim Sin Rak), a Korean who gained fame in the 1950s and early in the 1960s as the star of the world professional wrestling.

Kim Sin Rak was the "king" of professional wrestlers. He won the world professional wrestling championships five times in succession and also defended his international ace professional wrestlers' title for six years.

Inoki Kanji, too, cut a conspicuous figure in the world of professional wrestling and distinguished himself as its "king". His farewell match was planned to take place in Korea, the motherland of Kim Sin Rak, his mentor and benefactor. Prior to the match, he visited Pyongyang as head of a Japanese tourism inspection group, where he had the chance to enjoy the indoor mass gymnastics performance titled *We Will Hold Our Leader in High Esteem Forever*, staged in February 1995. As the performance ended, the members of the inspection group stood up and urged Inoki Kanji to move. But, he remained immersed in thought, unwilling to budge from his seat. He then asked his Korean guide how many people had taken part in the performance. Upon hearing that the number of performers was 10,000, he asked his aide to calculate the cost of staging such a performance in Japan. The calculated cost was exorbitant.

Yet he expressed his wish to hold such a performance involving about 2,000 people at an indoor stadium in Tokyo for half a year, on the condition that board and lodging would be provided for all the performers.

His wish was the same as that which has occasionally been expressed by foreign guests who happened to see a mass gymnastics performance in Korea.



Night view of the Pyongyang Indoor Stadium

The Pyongyang Indoor Stadium

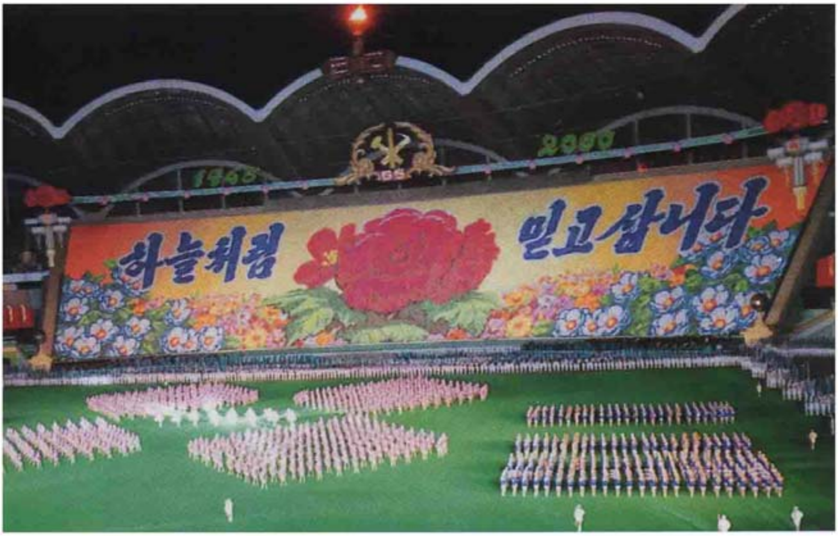
Located on Chollima Street, on the bank of the Pothong River in Pyongyang, the Pyongyang Indoor Stadium was inaugurated on April 8, 1973, as an all-purpose stadium. It occupies a total area of about 70,000 square metres. The building is capped by a roof which turns up at the front and back, the front rising as high as 42.5 metres. Its auditorium provides seating for 20,000 spectators in all on four floors. The floor space of the interior covers an area of about 4,600 square metres.

One side of its spacious ground floor is a stage, which is used as a podium during mass rallies or meetings, doubling as an extra seating area during sports events, enabling the building to serve as a stadium as well as an ideal venue for mass rallies or meetings. The stadium blends well with its surroundings—the People's Palace of Culture, built in the traditional Korean style, the Chongryu Restaurant, the Changgwang Health Complex, the Ice Rink, the fountains spouting jets of water as high as 70 metres, the spreading lawns, the modern buildings of Changgwang Street and Chollima Street and other structures.

The stadium is frequently used as a venue for indoor mass gymnastics performances, sports events and a variety of other colourful events.

THE SYSTEM OF CREATING MASS GYMNASTICS IN KOREA





A scene of the grand mass gymnastics and artistic performance *The Ever-Victorious Workers' Party of Korea*



The scene *Fly High Ye Pigeon* was highly appreciated during the Pyongyang International Festival of Sports and Culture for Peace held in April 1995.

The Mass Gymnastics Production Company, Known as the "Centre of Fantastic Creations"

In Korea, mass gymnastics performances have been staged on an extensive scale in the capital city and other provinces to mark national celebrations since the mid-1950s. Despite this there was still no standing mass gymnastics production company by the 1970s. In those days, each time the performance of a mass gymnastics piece was planned, a temporary production group would be organized, consisting of teachers of physical culture at universities and senior middle schools and people with a profound knowledge of fine arts and music.

In view of the fact that the performances were not rare events but almost an annual function, this method of production was not considered effective in highlighting the distinctive features and quality of any particular piece and ensuring the development of mass gymnastics.

Only in November 1971 did the Mass Gymnastics Production Company come into being as a standing body. Its mission was to take responsibility for the creation of new works of mass gymnastics and disseminating them throughout the country, as well as promoting the

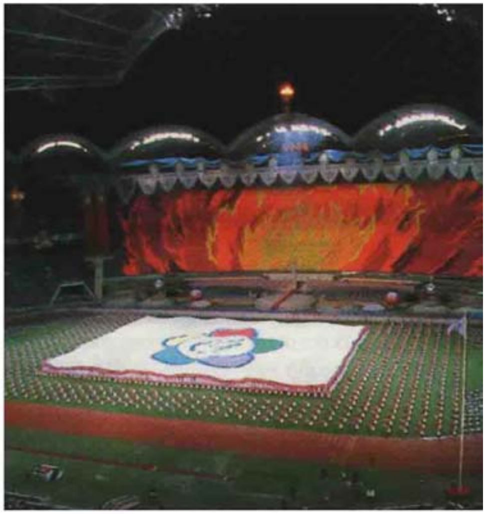
long-term development of Korean mass gymnastics.

This production company is based in Inhung-dong, Moranbong District, Pyongyang. With two buildings at its disposal—one a seven-storeyed structure, the other a three-storeyed one, the interior of which is decorated with marble—the company is divided into departments such as directing, gymnastics, backdrops and musical composition. It is equipped with everything necessary to fulfil its role, including costumes and a variety of gymnastics apparatus.

Since its foundation, the company has produced dozens of works, staging them on a total of 880 occasions.

The company also sends its creators to countries which request assistance in the sphere of mass gymnastics.

The Itar-Tass news agency of Russia, in a story dated September 29, 2001, described this company that produces wonderful mass gymnastics pieces, acknowledged as being unique to Korea, as the "centre of fantastic creations".



The opening ceremony of the 13th World Festival of Youth and Students was adorned by mass gymnastics.

The Overall Direction

Proper direction is a key to improving the rendering of mass gymnastics performances. However much the contents of a mass gymnastics production may cater to the tastes of the times, and however good the gymnasts, backdrops, music and gymnastic skill may be, they will not prove their worth and the quality of the work cannot be ensured, unless it is properly directed.

The matter of cardinal importance in this direction is to develop striking contrasts between different scenes. If this principle is overlooked, elements of the performance intended to provide great impact will not prove their worth and the performance will not avoid giving a sense of repetition and similarity.

As far as the general direction is concerned, close attention must be paid to forming organic combination between the gymnasts, backdrops and music. If these three ingredients of mass gymnastics lack organic unity and each moves independently, the performance itself will fail to pull the heartstrings of the spectators and form emotional harmony with them. The direction must ensure that the scenes aimed at showing the gymnasts' skill do just that, and that the scenes intended to focus the audience's attention on the backdrop do not distract from that objective. On this basis, the direction must faithfully realize the creators' plan.

The direction should also be geared to providing support for the gymnasts and backdrops in each act, and also to ensuring the uninterrupted flow of scenes, by means of music.

The direction of the performance is a process of examining in detail what the mass gymnastics production is planned to show and which part should be emphasized to agree with the spectators' psychology and, on this basis, working out a detailed plan of direction. This is precisely the creative process.

THE SCHOOLCHILDREN'S PHYSICAL TRAINING SCHOOL

The role of the gymnasts is of paramount importance in a mass gymnastics performance involving tens of thousands of people. The greater the number of highly-skilled gymnasts involved, the better the performance becomes.

To address this issue, organizers employed the method of selecting about 150 people from among the members of sports teams or clubs and among the students and pupils of either universities or senior middle schools, and assigning them to major parts of the gymnastic presentation. This proved its worth in raising the level of gymnastics performance, but this method alone was not a final solution to the annual question of where to find the best gymnasts.

Efforts to solve this question resulted in the establishment on January 28, 1983, of a schoolchildren's physical training school as a branch of the Mass Gymnastics Production Company. The school runs a technical training course for the schoolchildren of primary schools and six-year middle schools who have a special interest in gymnastics and wish to improve their gymnastic techniques after school. The creators of the Mass Gymnastics Production Company and more than 20 tutors of the school provide technical training for a variety of gymnastics, such as apparatus gymnastics, calisthenics and acrobatics. The number of applicants for this course reaches about 1,500 and they play a key role in the mass gymnastics performances. The gymnastic skills they have striven to master since they were young are not inferior to those of professional gymnasts. Some of the trainees of this course enrol at the University of Physical Education or in sports teams in order to perfect their skills.

The Schoolchildren's Physical Training School is situated at the foot of Moran Hill in Pyongyang. It maintains several of gymnastics halls at Kim Il Sung Stadium equipped with training facilities, and students have access to the field of the stadium during their outdoor training.

The school is always filled with pupils sweating profusely as they undergo serious training in gymnastic techniques after school.



Mass gymnastics are popularized from Pyongyang across Korea.

Putting Mass Gymnastics on a Mass Basis

Mass gymnastics in Korea began to spread throughout the country from the mid-1950s. A number of mass gymnastics pieces have been produced and staged in all provinces; some of those performed in the 1960s include: *Victors in Festivity,* staged in Hamhung in May 1961; *Our Glorious Homeland,* performed in Chongjin in September 1962; *Under the Banner of the Workers' Party,* staged in Hyesan in August 1963; and *A New Song of the Jangja River,*

performed in Kanggye in May 1964. They all dealt with the subject of the pride of each province in having transformed itself at the speed of Chollima, and each of them involved about 15,000 performers.

In September 1973 Nampho City staged the mass gymnastics performance titled *Flourishing South Phyongan Province under the Benevolent Sun,* given by 32,000 youth and schoolchildren. Composed of a prelude, seven acts, and a finale, it was the largest ever provincial mass gymnastics performance in terms of scale.

Mass gymnastics was popularized in both the capital city and the provinces, with centres established in many places.

The key to putting mass gymnastics on a mass basis is the school. Performers of mass gymnastics are the schoolchildren from primary to middle schools. After school, they are trained in gymnastic movements in the playgrounds of their respective schools, under the supervision of tutors who have previously gone through the training course. The training consists of drills, basic technical movements and the composition or change of mass formations. Once these activities are mastered, schoolchildren from several schools who will perform for the same scenes gather at a single place to go through intensive training for the scenes concerned to ensure unity and harmony of movement. Following this intensive training course, they undergo rehearsals.

In the process of training, the schoolchildren move as one on the order of their tutor. They set great store by the honour of their respective schools, and each strives to maintain it. In the composition of formations, those schools whose pupils are the most disciplined and skilled in movements are positioned at the centre of either the gymnasts or the backdrops.

Schools record which pupils are exemplary in study, mass gymnastics and various other aspects of life.

Many of the schoolchildren who take part in mass gymnastics treasure the experience, recalling their performances for the rest of their lives.



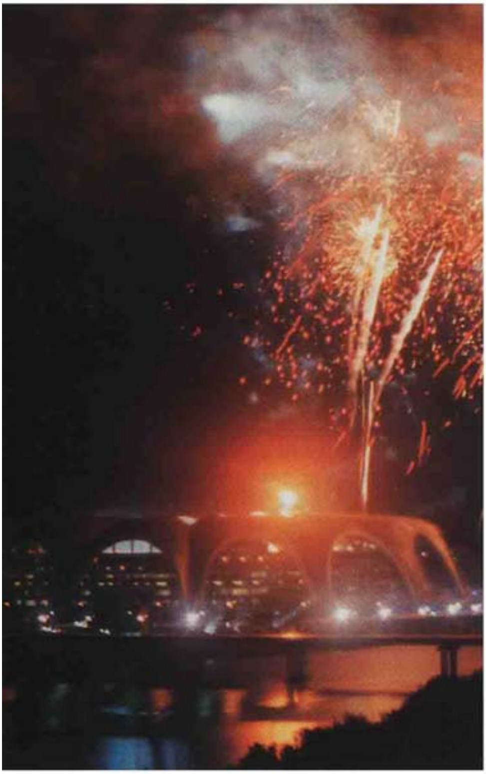
The mass gymnastics *Glorious Homeland* staged in Chongjin in September 1962



The mass gymnastics *A Silk Country* staged in Sinuju in September 1964

The schoolchildren in Kanggye stage the mass gymnastics *A New Song of the Jangja River* on the May Day of 1964.





Night view of the May Day Stadium, the venue of the grand mass gymnastics and artistic performance *Arirang*



Soya milk is supplied to the performers of the mass gymnastics.

STATE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Mass gymnastics performances cost a great deal to stage, a reflection of their enormous scale. The figures given below are an indication of how much.

The mass gymnastics performance given in September 1988 involved the use of 36,000 pieces of 26 kinds of costume, 84,000 pieces of 39 kinds of equipment, and 2.2 million sheets of printed colour paper weighing dozens of tons. Besides this, it also entailed enormous expenditure on the application of scientific and technical means, the transportation required to carry the performers and other personnel, the purchase of refreshments for the performers, and the provision of other necessary materials and equipment.

The cost of providing the huge amount of materials and other necessities dissuades many countries, though willing, from staging a mass gymnastics performance. Of those that dare to attempt it, most stage it only on a small scale.

Lack of materials and money will render the production of a mass gymnastics performance of high ideological and artistic quality impossible and prevent its constant development, essential to satisfying the aesthetic tastes of the times.

For this reason, Korea directs state concern to laying the material foundations needed for mass gymnastics. It has designated factories to produce equipment, costumes, colour paper and other necessary items and has supplied them with raw materials and other necessities to ensure regular production. It also pays great attention to making effective use of existing equipment and costumes.

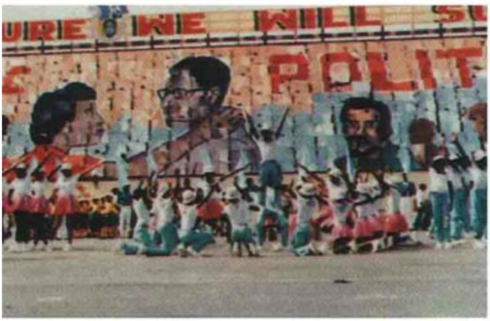
Mass gymnastics in Korea, based on the enormous state expenditure and material supply at the highest possible level, are developing continuously.

WORLDWIDE EXCHANGES AND COOPERATION IN MASS GYMNASTICS





A scene of the mass gymnastics *Prosperous Nigeria*



Korean specialists helped production of this mass gymnastics work in Guyana.

FRIENDLY SPORTS DELEGATIONS

Korea sends its specialists to foreign countries to sincerely help them realize their wish to stage mass gymnastics performances. So far, such exchanges and cooperation have been made with 48 countries on 94 occasions.

In January 1989 Korean mass gymnastics specialists dispatched to Angola ensured the successful staging of the opening and closing ceremonies of its first national cultural festival with the production of mass gymnastics performances staged by 8,000 people, including 3,400 people for the backdrop. On March 21, 1990, a mass gymnastics work, prepared with the assistance from the Korean specialists, was staged in Windhoek, Namibia, as an item of the programme for the celebration of the country's Independence Day. The mass gymnastics performance titled *Long Live the Independence of Namibia!* was successfully held, attended by President Sam Nujoma, the prime minister, 3,000 foreign guests and 100,000 other spectators.

In October 1997 Korean backdrop specialists were dispatched to China to assist in the successful staging of the closing ceremony of the 8th National Games of China. The Korean mass gymnastics specialists dispatched to Dalian, China, in June 1999 rendered assistance to the production of the mass gymnastics piece, *A Great Moment.* In May 2001 Korean specialists were invited by the municipal government of Beijing to create Part II: *Vitality—Brand-new Beijing* of the mass gymnastics performance titled *Hello, 21*.

The Chinese director of the performance, Chen Weiya, said: "This is a piece of very high quality which cannot be produced by either the United States or Australia. Such a great piece can be created only by the Korean specialists."

The 21st Universiade was opened on August 22 with the successful staging of *Hello. 21*.



A scene of *Hello, 21* staged in Beijing in August 2001

THE MASS GYMNASTICS PERFORMANCE, PROSPEROUS NIGERIA

In October 1996 a mass gymnastics performance titled *Prosperous Nigeria* was staged in Abuja, the capital city of Nigeria, situated on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea in the west of Africa. The third act of the mass gymnastics, *For a Rich and Powerful Nigeria,* produced with the assistance of Korean specialists, unfolded a scene about the success gained in the development of national culture in Nigeria. As the gymnasts vigorously presented the feature on the ground, the backdrops displayed a scene of a football player kicking a ball that flew into the goal, at which point another scene appeared showing a scoreboard marked 4:3. The spectators, who had been watching with wonder from the beginning of the performance, were so delighted to see the scene that they all rose, tossing into the air items of clothing or things they had been holding. Some of them even ran out onto the performance area to dance with the gymnasts. The reaction was quite unexpected. The Korean specialists worried about the possible suspension of the performance due to the disturbance. The President, who had been familiar with the content of the performance beforehand, had singled out mass gymnastics as the only programme for the celebration of the Independence Day, throwing out all other suggestions for the occasion. To the relief of the Koreans, the event proceeded successfully without further interruption.

As soon as the performance was over, Wahab Rawal, a tutor at Tusejong Girls' Middle School No. 4, rushed to the Korean specialists and said that she herself, though she had supervised the training of the pupils, was completely captivated by the performance. "This performance has caused a sensation in the history of Nigeria," she said. "Our football team was very successful at the Olympic Games in Atlanta, creating a global sensation, but today's performance has given our people as much delight as our football team did. I would like," she added in a voice filled with emotion, "to extend my utmost thanks to Comrade Kim Jong Il, who has sent excellent mass gymnastics specialists to bring about a second ecstasy in Nigeria."

The President and the key government officials were more delighted than anyone else over the success of the Independence Day celebration. The Nigerian government requested that the group of Korean specialists should remain to proceed with the preparations for the celebration of Independence Day in 1997 and for the important events envisaged for 1998.

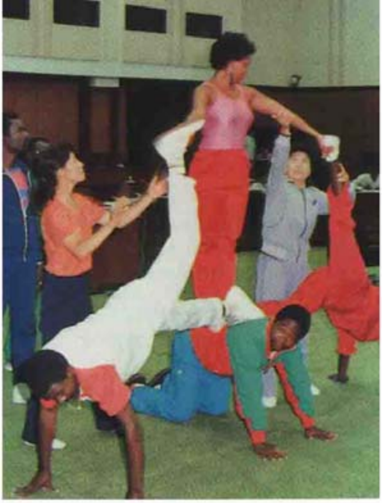
INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP ON MASS GYMNASTICS

Foreigners, especially sports specialists, were very eager to know the secret behind the creation of Korean-style mass gymnastics, and visited Korea, where they studied Korean mass gymnastics theory and learned about Korea's experience in this sphere.

A member of an African mass gymnastics inspection team said that he had learned much at a special course on the subject in Korea and suggested that Korea organize an international workshop,



Foreigners learning plastering colour paper on the panels of books for the backdrop



A workshop of mass gymnastics at the People's Palace of Culture in Pyongyang

though it might be a burdensome responsibility. He was not the only one to make such a suggestion.

Upon these requests, the Government of the DPRK organized mass gymnastics workshops. From July 18-30, 1989 Pyongyang hosted the first workshop for mass gymnastics specialists from non-aligned countries. The participants expressed satisfaction with the workshop, saying that it helped them better understand mass gymnastics through a good combination of other programmes, such as visits to places where the preparation for mass gymnastics was under way and experience-swapping sessions. They extended their thanks to Kim Jong Il for having arranged the workshop. The second workshop was held in April 1992.

"The Acme of Art, Something beyond the Imagination"

Introduced hereunder are some of the comments made by foreigners after witnessing the mass gymnastics and artistic performance, titled The Ever-Victorious Workers' Party of Korea, staged to mark the 55th anniversary of the founding of the Workers' Party of Korea on October 10, 2000.

"It is a piece showing a succinct picture of the outstanding quality of the great leader and the might of the Korean people solidly united ideologically, spiritually, and organizationally. It is as mysterious as the wonders of the heavens." (Deputy Chief of the General Staff of the Chinese People's Liberation Army)

"Only in Pyongyang can we enjoy such a performance, which is unique to Korea and which cannot be imitated by any other country. It is the acme of art, something beyond the imagination." (a member of the orchestra of Bonn University in Germany)



"It is a wonderful and surprising performance. It is part of your country's heritage, to be inherited by the younger generations. It would be next to impossible for us to see such a wonderful performance in the United States." (Stanley Roth, Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs of the US State Department)

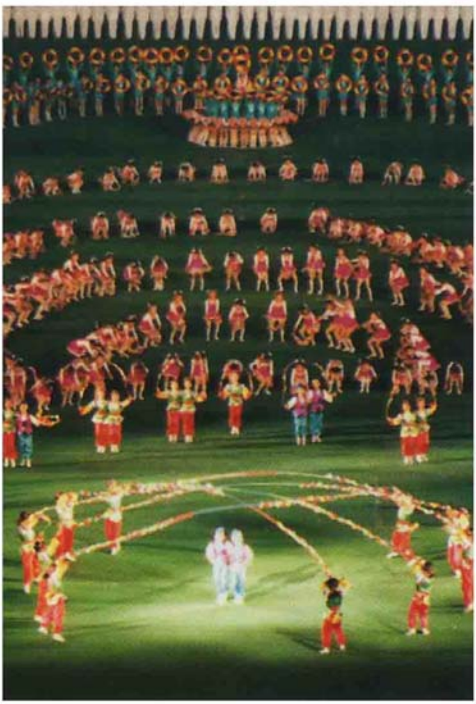
"It was marvellous.... I was fascinated by the performance. It's really the pinnacle of art. This kind of mass gymnastics is possible only in Korea." (Erik, coordinator of the Korean office of Sweden's PMU Interlife)

"It was the most surprising and wonderful performance I have seen in my life. I doubt I could see such a performance anywhere else. Such a wonder cannot be produced unless the people are united in mind and purpose." (Elaine Shocas, Chief of Staff, US State Department)

THE GRAND MASS GYMNASTICS AND ARTISTIC PERFORMANCE *ARIRANG*







Arirang, the grand mass gymnastics and artistic performance now showing, is the development of a new form, featuring a strong national flavour, as its title suggests, and combining mass gymnastics and artistic performance to adapt to the requirements of the new century. Consequently, it represents the future of physical culture and art in Korea.

Arirang is one of Korea's most famous folk songs.

The exact year of its composition is not known, and many variations exist: old *Arirang* versions such as *Sodo Arirang* (Sodo means provinces in the western region of Korea—Tr.), *Yongchon Arirang* (Yongchon is a district of North Kyongsang Province—Tr.) and *Milyang Arirang* (Milyang is a district of South Kyongsang Province—Tr.); versions of *Arirang,* sung in the early 20th century, such as *New Arirang* and *Long-tone Arirang,* all of which are lamentations over the fate of a ruined nation; and various present-day versions of the song, such as *Arirang of the Prosperous Powerful Nation* and *Arirang of Reunification.*

They were not created in the same era, nor in the same place, yet the Korean people have loved singing them, expressing all their joy and sorrow, happiness and misfortune in their melodies and words, because of the rich national flavour and the unique tunes.

Arirang sings of the Korean people's life as it truthfully is, though the themes vary from one version to another. It is easy to sing and its artistic quality reflects centuries of refinement. For these characteristics, it is now a world-famous song.

The world-famous *Arirang* is *Sinjo Arirang,* which was the theme song of the silent film "Arirang" produced in 1926.

The current grand mass gymnastics and artistic performance uses *Arirang,* which embodies the sentiments and soul of the Korean people and mirrors the history of the Korean nation, as its theme, and develops it by employing various methods of portrayal, such as famous Korean songs, mass gymnastics, dances and acrobatics. The performance sings the praises of the Korean nation, compelled in the past to sing a tearful *Arirang* over their miserable lives, but now

enjoying a happy life while singing a joyful *Arirang;* it also highlights the determination of the Korean nation to sing a victorious *Arirang* tomorrow, when they have become a great prosperous powerful nation.

The first act, *Arirang Nation,* unfolds an artistic interpretation of the history of the Korean nation as it crosses the pass of painful tears and fights to win back its downtrodden dignity, singing *Arirang,* the song to which it has a special attachment.

The second act, *Arirang of Songun,* exalts the present-day reality in which the Korean nation are fully demonstrating their dignity, singing *Arirang* century after century.

The third act, *Arirang Rainbow,* portrays the Arirang nation's dream flowering into reality, while illustrating Korea's single-hearted unity in the process of its advance in the new century.

The fourth act, *Arirang of Reunification,* fills the whole of the stadium with the Korean nation's burning desire for reunification, the homogeneous nation of the same land, the same blood, the same language and the same customs.

The finale, *Arirang of the Prosperous Powerful Nation,* highlights the conviction and will of the Arirang nation that they will build a great prosperous powerful nation, still singing *Arirang* in the new century.

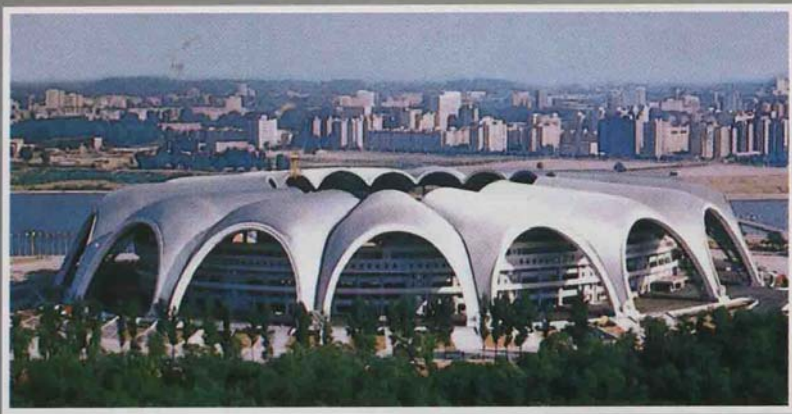
This epic work, produced by prominent creators in the fields of sport and the arts, involves 100,000 performers, including famous Korean artists and gymnasts, some of them prizewinners in national and international contests, and students and schoolchildren.








90



The May Day Stadium

Located on Rungna Islet, which lies in the Taedong River, Pyongyang, the May Day Stadium is one of the capital's most prominent features. Groundbreaking work for its construction started in July 1986, and it opened on May 1, 1989. Its site covers an area of 400,000 square metres; its total floor space is 207,000 square metres; its structure itself covers an area of 166,000 square metres; and its seating capacity is 150,000. Its roof, with a surface area of 94,000 square metres and made up of 16 semi-circular spans, is in the form of a parachute protruding 60 metres inward and 40 metres outward. Its structural form and building method won a gold prize at the 16th International Inventions Salon.

This stadium served as the venue for the opening and closing ceremonies of the 13th World Festival of Youth and Students held in July 1989, the Pyongyang International Sports and Cultural Festival for Peace held in April 1995, and the mass gymnastics and artistic performance, *The Ever-Victorious Workers' Party of Korea*, staged in October 2000.